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ABSTRACT

A study examined the effect of an alternative language arts program designed to encourage children to take up reading and writing in ways that they find personally, socially, and politically relevant. Throughout a school year, the development of the alternative language arts program in a third/fourth grade classroom in an urban school was documented. Extensive case studies were conducted on five children in the classroom. Data included: classroom observation; field notes; children's stories, poems, essays, and reading response journals; and in-depth conversational interviews that focused on the audiences and functions of the children's reading and writing. Results demonstrated the many different ways in which the children used reading and writing as vehicles for personal, social, and political exploration. Results also documented how particular children constructed their own unique repertoires of reading and writing functions--repertoires that reflected the interests, needs, and issues most central to their individual sensibilities and life histories. Findings suggest: (1) educators need to question viewing comprehension and production of the conceptual content of written texts as the primary functions of reading and writing; and (2) relocating classroom literacy activities within the concrete exigencies of children's lives seems to hold promise for the development of new and more productive forms of literacy pedagogy. (Five tables of data and two figures presenting student writing samples are included; 86 references, a taxonomy of personal, social, and political functions of reading and writing, and eight samples of student writing are attached.) (Author/RS)

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Maniac Magee and Ragtime Tumpie: Children Negotiating Self and World Through Reading and Writing

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Abstract

In this article, we report the results from a study of five children who participated in a year-long alternative language arts program in a third/fourth grade classroom in an urban school. Informed by the work of narrative theorists, reader-response theorists, and theorists of critical literacy, this program was designed to encourage children to take up reading and writing in ways that they found personally, socially, and politically relevant to their lives and the human exigencies of their families and communities. Throughout the school year we documented the development of the classroom program, and we conducted extensive case studies of five of the children in the classroom. Among the data we collected were observations of the classroom literacy events, field notes of our interactions with the children in and out of school, the stories, poems, and essays and reading response journals that the children composed, and in-depth conversational interviews that focused on the audiences and functions of the children's reading and writing. Findings from the study demonstrated many different ways in which the children used reading and writing as vehicles for personal, social, and political exploration, enabling them to understand the complex urban landscape they inhabited, to explore new roles and social identities, to wrestle with vexing social and political problems, and to engage in efforts designed to transform their lives and their worlds. Findings also allowed us to document how particular children constructed their own unique repertoires of reading and writing functions—repertoires that reflected the interests, needs, and issues most central to their individual sensibilities and life histories. These findings have a number of implications for understanding children's literacy development, as well as for rethinking literacy pedagogy. For example, they suggest the need to question our tendencies to view comprehension and production of the conceptual content of written texts as the primary functions of reading and writing. More fundamental to "being literate" seem to be the ways in which reading and writing may be used to understand, negotiate, and transform human experience. Thus relocating classroom literacy activities within the concrete exigencies of children's lives seems to hold promise for the development of new and more productive forms of literacy pedagogy.

MANIAC MAGEE AND RAGTIME TUMPIE: NEGOTIATING SELF AND WORLD THROUGH READING AND WRITING

Nine-year-old Tanya had recently completed an essay entitled Non-Violence, a composition that she had read and revised several times before acknowledging that it was complete. In one of several interviews we conducted with her about the reading and writing she did over the course the school year, she shared her thoughts about the importance of what she had written, explaining how writing and re-reading the essay had helped her to construct and affirm her beliefs about the kind of person and community member she hoped to become:

> Like when I wrote this story and everything, and I re-read and I re-read and I re-read it so I get across, so I get the feeling not to do violence when I grow up, or not to be [violent], and when I see people doing, being violent to others, try to stop 'em or something if I can.

Similarly, after eight-year-old Jamar had finished reading I Have a Dream: The Story of Martin (Davidson, 1991) and Encyclopedia Brown Gets His Man (Sobol, 1982), he reflected on the meanings and functions that he associated with these books that allowed him to explore the possible selves and future responsibilities that he might one day assume as a member of his community:

> They make me think that I want to, that I could help the community or go up in space or be an actor or have all three. I have three choices to choose from [when I grow up], helping the community, going up in space, or being an actor . . . See, if I think about my life, I only think about being an actor, but if I read Encyclopedia Brown or a book about Martin Luther King or Abraham Lincoln, then it helps me to think about different things instead of being an actor.

In discussing these texts, Tanya and Jamar provided us with insight into some of the ways that reading and writing functioned in their lives, enabling them to explore new roles, identities, and responsibilities as school children, family and community members, and citizens in the larger society. In this regard, their voices echo recent themes within the theoretical realms of narrative theory, reader-response theory, and critical literacy. Together these themes have spawned a renewed interest in the life-informing and life-transforming possibilities afforded by reading and

writing. In the following sections, we review many of the constructs from these theoretical domains and findings from relevant recent research in literacy. This review serves to outline the interdisciplinary framework and rationale that we used in examining some of the complex and complementary ways that reading and writing functioned as sources of personal, social, and political understanding in the lives of many children that we studied.

Theoretical Background

Theories of Narrative Understanding

Theories about the potential of narrative to function as a way of understanding one's own and others' experience have been the focus of numerous scholars in both the humanities and the social sciences in recent years (e.g., Booth, 1988; Bruner, 1986; Carr, 1986; Greene, 1982; MacIntyre; 1981; Martin, 1983; Narayan, 1991; Ricoeur, 1984; Rosaldo, 1989; Rosen, 1988; White, 1987; Witherall & Noddings, 1991). In general, these theorists have argued that because narratives are organized around the dimension of time in lived experience, they allow us to interpret our pasts, envision our futures, and understand the lives of others with whom we interact. In this way, stories endow experience with meaning and coherence, providing us with a means to organize, interpret, and define our lives.

The centrality of stories in understanding both self and culture has been given careful treatment by Bruner (1986, 1990) who has suggested that narrative modes of thought "provide the major link between our own sense of self and our sense of others in the social world around us" (p. 69). Especially important for Bruner are the ways in which stories succeed in rendering reality subjunctive or hypothetical through the depiction of the subjective consciousness of protagonists and the consequential alternativeness of the worlds they inhabit. In relation to this point, Bruner has argued that stories engage readers in the exploration of human possibilities rather than in stated certainties. As such, stories provide "map[s] of possible roles and possible worlds in which action, thought, and self determination are permissible (or desirable)" (p. 66).

Other theorists have foregrounded the ethical value of reading literature and the influence that stories may have on the development of an individuals' character or self (e.g., Booth, 1988;

Coles, 1989; MacIntyre, 1981). Coles, for example, has developed the idea that stories achieve their particular force through characters and events that engage readers in a psychological or moral journey. Such a journey allows readers to explore life's contingencies and dilemmas; and in so doing, enables them to "take matters of choice and commitment more seriously than they might otherwise have done" (p. 90). Likewise, Booth (1988) has argued that individuals live much of their lives through images derived in part from stories of themselves and others (both real and fictional). So spontaneous and unrehearsed is this narrative process that individuals often "cannot draw a clear line between what [they] *are* and what [they] have become" as a result of the stories they have enjoyed, experienced, and appropriated over the course of their lives (p. 229). According to MacIntyre (1981), an individual's understanding of society is a function of the repertoire of stories that they have read, heard, and inherited. These stories constitute the "dramatic resources" that individuals use in constructing their own moralities and evaluating the moralities of others. Therefore, depriving children of stories of social traditions and moral life "leave[s] them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words" (p. 201).

Theories of Reading and Responding to Literature

The personal, social, and moral functions of stories (or literature more broadly conceived) have also been a central focus within of reader-response theory (e.g., Beach, 1990; Hynds, 1990; Iser, 1978; Rosenblatt, 1938, 1978). According to these theorists, literary experience can function as a source of personal and social understanding that provides readers with a means to negotiate and interpret human experience. In her now classic work, Literature as Exploration (1938) Rosenblatt argued that literature represents "an embodiment of human personalities, human situations, human conflicts and achievements" (p. vii). Thus, reading literature is best described as an act of discovery through which individuals participate in the lives and experiences of others, explore possible selves and possible worlds, and acquire insights that make their own lives more meaningful and comprehensible. In this regard, literature is unique in its ability to provide readers with a "lived-through" understanding of experience and not simply "knowledge about" themselves and the social world (p. 38). In addition, literature permits an "objective" analysis or examination

of one's own life experiences because these conflicts appear "outside ourselves" when seen through the lives and experiences of characters or protagonists.

Theories of Critical Literacy

Theorists in the developing field of critical literacy have appropriated the idea that literacy is a critical tool for understanding the relationships among text, self, and world. In particular, these theorists have foregrounded the social, cultural, and political dimensions of literacy, insisting that reading and writing involve much more than the simple ability to understand and communicate conceptual content through written texts. Rather, literacy is viewed as necessary for full participation within many social groups and practices. Moreover, theorists of critical literacy have begun to articulate exactly how reading and writing may be instrumental in interrogating and transforming one's own life and the hegemony of received social traditions (e.g., Edelsky, 1991; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux, 1988; Knoblauch & Brannon, 1993; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Madigan, 1992; McGinley & Kamberelis, 1992; Robinson & Stock, 1990; Walsh, 1991; Willinsky, 1990). According to Freire and Macedo (1987), critical literacy develops students' awareness of their rights and responsibilities, as well as an understanding of the socially and historically constructed nature of their experience. In this way, literacy has the potential to expand the range of social identities and possible selves that individuals adopt as they attempt to situate themselves and others in narratives that mobilize and revitalize their hopes for the future.

Relevant Empirical Research

Research on the Functions of Writing

Drawing primarily on the work of Sapir (1921) and Jakobson (1960), literacy researchers have focused on children's exploitation of the rhetorical possibilities of written language. In their pioneering work, Britton (1970; 1982) and Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, and Rosen (1975) found that writing was employed to accomplish three basic rhetorical functions: expressive, transactional, and poetic. The most basic function (and the earliest to develop in children) is the expressive function. Expressive discourse is discourse that is close to the self. When writing expressively, the speaker or writer verbalizes his thoughts and feelings and displays his or her

close relationship with a listener or reader. According to Britton, both transactional and poetic functions grow out of the expressive function. Transactional discourse is discourse that is used to get things done. It is highly referential, with most expressive and connotative features edited out. Poetic discourse is discourse aimed at creating a verbal object that will be aesthetically pleasing to the listener or reader. The internal structure of the poetic texts and the complex allusions to the feelings and attitudes of the writer are central to poetic discourse.

Since the work of Britton and his colleagues, many researchers have employed, criticized, and extended their theoretical scheme of writing functions. In addition to the expressive, transactional, and poetic functions, children have been reported to use writing for a variety of other purposes. Among the most commonly documented functions of writing for both children and adults is to provide memory support, to help in ordering of information, and to assist in organizing daily activities or personal interests (Bissex, 1980; Clark & Florio, 1982; Dyson, 1989; Fiering, 1981; Fishman, 1988; Gundlach, 1981; Heath, 1983; Hudson, 1986; Monaghan, 1991; Newkirk, 1989). In addition to this function, several researchers have found that children engage in writing to create texts that have individual symbolic and affective significance. Such texts often allow writers to savor or recall personal experiences or events (Bissex, 1980; Dyson, 1989; Gundlach, 1981, 1982; Newkirk, 1989; Scollon & Scollon, 1981). Children and adolescents have also been found to use writing to substitute for oral messages either because of the absence of a receiver, prohibitions against oral transmission, or embarrassment involved in oral transmission (Fiering, 1981; Litowitz & Gundlach, 1985; Monaghan, 1991; Shuman, 1986). These researchers have noted that writing is an especially apt form of communication in these situations because of its somewhat unique semiotic property of allowing considerable distance in time and space between sender and receiver.

Writing has also been reported to serve certain "mimetic" functions (Fiering, 1981; Heath, 1983; Hudson, 1986; Litowitz & Gundlach, 1985; Shuman, 1986; Whale & Robinson, 1978). Mimetic writing involves modeling the voices, styles, and genres characteristic of other writers. These other writers are quite often published authors who are admired and respected. For younger

children certain imitated styles and genres are often derived from children's stories and fairy tales (Gundlach, 1981; Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Whale & Robinson, 1978). For older children and adolescents, the modeled styles and genres are often ones associated with adult roles and responsibilities (Fiering, 1981; Fishman, 1988; Litowitz & Gundlach, 1985; Monaghan, 1991; Shuman, 1986). As Kamberelis and Scott (1992) have noted, writing like a newspaper reporter, writing in the crisp telegraphic style of Hemingway, or writing like a sorrowful young Werther are explicit examples of the mimetic writing of older children. Such writing is not unlike the younger child donning her mother's clothing and approximating her speech style. Through discursive experimentation, children and adolescents engage in the exploration of literate identities that they may eventually take up, transform, or resist. In this regard, mimetic writing is central to the process of constructing and affirming one's identity and one's sense of personal history.

Finally, many researchers have demonstrated some of the ways in which children and adolescents use writing to establish and maintain social relationships and to assume certain positions of power within particular social formations. More specifically, researchers have shown that children and adolescents use writing to establish and affirm friendships (e.g., Dyson, 1989; Fishman, 1988), to influence the structure of peer group interactions (e.g., Fishman, 1988; Shuman, 1986), to mark specific ideas or events as important or business-like (e.g., Fiering, 1981; Fishman, 1988; Heath, 1983; Shuman, 1986), and to control access to certain spaces and activities (Bissex, 1980; Fiering, 1981).

In addition to documenting the many individual functions of writing that children and adolescents exploit, researchers have noted that any given piece of writing may involve multiple functions. Dyson (1989), for example, demonstrated how the interpersonal and social functions of writing are almost always related to many other functions. In her studies, children's writing frequently involved making written objects for others, and children usually addressed their artistic writings to the particular individuals to whom these artifacts would be given. Dyson also found that, when writing was used to mark personal ownership, to support memory, or to organize information, it was almost always also used to initiate, maintain, or alter children's social

networks. Similarly, when writing was used for playful purposes, it was simultaneously used to establish and sustain links among peers. And when children wrote stories, they were almost always concurrently engaged in representing meaning, interacting with others, and reflecting on personal experiences.

In sum, research on writing has uncovered many ways in which children and adolescents use writing that exceed those initially proposed by Britton and his colleagues. However, even this research does not seem to have fully addressed the core possibilities that writing offers for understanding self and world and for engaging in transformative personal, social and political practices.

Research on the Functions of Reading and Responding to Literature

Drawing primarily on Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theory of literary reading and understanding, researchers have explored the interanimation of readers' personal histories and the meanings of literary texts. Garrison and Hynds (1991), for example, examined the processes through which proficient and less proficient college readers evoked and reflected upon personal experience in the context of reading four short stories. Analyses of students' written responses revealed that the reading of both proficient and less proficient readers was highly evocative, as they called forth "personal memories and feelings, perceptions of the reading experience, and generalized beliefs about the world" (p. 275). Results also indicated that proficient readers tended to move beyond mere personal evocation of experience in response to their reading, enlisting both the literary text and the lived experiences it brought to mind in a recursive process of mutual understanding.

In a related study, Beach (1990) examined the processes through which several college students' drew upon autobiographical experiences in understanding and interpreting literature. Analysis of students' written responses to several literary works provided insight into the non-linear nature of the processes through which the readers interpreted both literature and life. Specifically, results indicated that, as students elaborated on their own personal experiences in

response to reading a literary text, they recursively returned to that text, engaging it as a vehicle for reinterpreting and understanding the autobiographical experiences they had initially evoked.

In contrasting the think-aloud protocols of 7th- and 11th-grade students engaged in reading literary and informational texts, Langer (1990) identified four recursive stances that students enacted as frameworks for their reading. She labeled these stances as follows; (1) being out and stepping into an envisionment, (2) being in and moving through an envisionment, (3) stepping back and rethinking what one knows, and (4) stepping out and objectifying experience. These stances are useful heuristics in understanding how readers make sense of the world of texts, as well as how they use their developing interpretations of texts to understand their own experiences **in** the world.

Employing a similar approach, Earthman (1992) studied the processes of more-experienced and less-experienced college readers while they read several short stories and poems. She found that, in contrast to less-experienced readers, more-experienced readers employed a wide variety of approaches or literary reading strategies that resulted in richer and more complex understandings of literature. These strategies involved (1) accounting for missing information where the text was under-determined, (2) drawing upon extra textual information in constructing literary understanding, and (3) viewing the text from multiple perspectives or points of view.

Finally, some researchers have also examined the influence of reader's stance, as well as specific instructional approaches on students' responses to literature. Many (1991) compared the free responses of elementary and secondary school students to several short stories. Results indicated that students who adopted a more aesthetic stance in relation to their reading tended to draw connections between their own lives and the lives and experiences of story characters. Many concluded that readers who assumed an asethetic stance were more likely to use literature to acquire understandings about themselves and their world. In a similar study, Many and Wiseman (1992) examined the influence of three different instructional programs on the nature of third-grade students' responses to literature. Analyses of students' oral responses during story discussions revealed that

when discussions focused on the literary experience as opposed to the analysis of literature, students' reading provided them insights and understanding into their own lives and experiences.

Taken together, the studies of Garrison and Hynds (1991), Beach (1990), Langer (1990), Earthman (1992), Many (1991), and Many and Wiseman (1992) offer new understandings of the complex processes involved in reading and responsing to literature, especially with respect to the ways in which readers use and reflect upon personal experience in their transactions with literary works. However, this research has not gone far enough in exploring the personal, social, and political understanding that theorists have argued can result from readers' transactions with literature.

To their credit, a few researchers have begun to investigate the actual life-informing and life-transforming effects of reading and responding to literature. Kroll (1992), for example, documented the ways in which reading literature about the Vietnam War functioned in the lives of several college students. For some students reading enabled them to reconcile the problematic emotions involved in dealing with friends or family members who had served in Vietnam or in other wars. For other students reading served as a means through which they were able to openly confront and explore the dilemmas of human emotion and conflict that often arise in circumstances of war and other natural and national crises.

In a study with a similar focus, Radway (1984) investigated the meanings and functions that several adult women assigned to the experience of reading romance novels as part of their daily lives. Analyses of interviews, informal group discussions, and written questionnaires revealed that women's reading functioned in both oppositional and compensatory ways, serving as a means of "securing privacy while at the same time providing companionship and conversation" (p.11). More specifically, Radway found that reading romance novels served as a way for the women to oppose or temporarily resist the daily demands of others for nurturance, emotional support, and material care. In this sense, reading functioned as a way for women to contest their domestic social roles and identities. Reading also served as a means through which they could vicariously experience the attention, nurturance, and sense of female individuality not permitted in their day-to-day existences. For most women, romance reading functioned a source of emotional and

psychological replenishment by providing them with a utopian vision that disrupted the oppression and emotional abandonment that they suffered in real life. Beyond this disruption, reading romance novels allowed the women to envision ways in which female individuality and a sense of self could be compatible with nurturance and care by another (p. 55).

Finally, Wolf and Heath (1993) explored how literature was read and integrated into the lives and experiences of two mainstream, school-oriented children during their preschool and early school years. The study focused on lives of two sisters, Lindsey and Ashley Wolf. The authors documented the meanings and functions that these two children enacted in connection with their reading of literature at home over a nine-year period. In general, findings from the investigation provided insight into some of the ways in which the two children dramatized, explored, and re-read their own experiences through the lives and experiences of the characters and events they encountered through literature. Through the dramatic enactment and exploration of story lives and worlds, Lindsey and Ashley explored their own worlds and developing social identities. Their reading served as a source of personal and social knowledge as they sought to understand and negotiate a variety of social roles, relationships, and responsibilities involving friends, family members, and other members of their ever-changing world.

The work of Kroll (1992), Radway (1991), and Wolf and Heath (1993) demonstrate that reading can serve as a source of knowledge about one's self, other people, and one's world. More importantly, however, this work provides initial evidence of some of the ways in which reading may become a means through which people negotiate and transform a variety of conflicts and dilemmas related to their particular experiences and social worlds.

Findings from these recent studies about the reading and writing experiences of children and adults provide a rationale for exploring the personal, social, and political functions that children might enact through reading and writing in school. We designed the present investigation to pursue this line of inquiry. The study had three specific goals. The first goal was to document the personal, social, and political functions associated with the self-selected reading and writing that children did about themselves, their communities, and their cultures. The second goal was to

explore how the enactment of these functions were distributed across acts of reading and writing. The third goal was to document the unique ways in which reading and writing functions were enacted and coordinated within the literate practices of specific case-study children. An underlying assumption of this work is that it is important to understand how students connect reading and writing with learning to understand, negotiate, and transform their experience. Understanding the life-informing and life-transforming potential of reading and writing could provide a new basis upon which we as educators might develop literacy curricula that are more personally meaningful, culturally relevant, and motivating.

Methods

Classroom Context, Participants, and Curriculum

The participants in the study were five African American third-grade children attending an urban elementary school, located in a major midwestern city. We began with eight case-study children, but three of them (one boy and two girls) dropped out of the study because their families relocated to other parts of the city or country. The elementary school drew its students from the surrounding neighborhood, a community rich in African-American culture and with strong connections to the auto industry.

The five case-study children were members of a language arts classroom comprised of 35 third- and fourth-grade students. The children in the classroom represented a wide range of academic abilities. None of the children received any special instruction in reading or writing beyond what was provided by the regular classroom teacher. The five case-study children were not the most high-achieving students in the classroom; neither were they the most low-achieving students. Nor did the five case-study children engage in significantly more or less reading or writing than other children. However, taken together, these five children enacted a fairly wide range of personal, social, and political functions through their reading and writing. In fact, they were chosen for case-study analysis because, based on their reading, writing, and our interactions with them during the first weeks of the study, their work seemed to represent the wide range of functions enacted by the entire group of children in the classroom.

In the year prior to this investigation, the first author and a graduate student had worked in collaboration with the children's classroom teacher to develop an alternative literacy program. The educational philosophy and instructional practices of the classroom teacher served as the impetus for the kind of program that was developed. In addition to being concerned with children's literacy development, the teacher was equally concerned with their personal and emotional needs. Among other things, she frequently provided children with rides to and from school, took children to cultural and recreational events, developed personal relationships with many of the children's parents, and became involved with interest groups and activities in the local community. In sum, the teacher enacted an "ethic of care" with respect the children, their parents, and other community members.

Grounded in this "ethic of care" and based on the teacher's child- and community-centered educational philosophy, this curriculum was designed to provide students with instructional experiences in reading and writing that were more personally meaningful, culturally relevant, and motivating. A major focus in developing the curriculum was the notion that reading and writing are fundamentally social and political activities that are endowed with meaning and value when children use them for authentic purposes in the contexts of their own lives. As a result, classroom activities were structured to provide children with opportunities to read, write, and talk about topics and experiences that had personal meaning for them.

In developing the curriculum, instructional ideas and activities congruent with a whole language view of literacy learning (e.g., Edelsky, Altwerger, & Flores, 1991; Goodman, 1986; 1992) were adapted in light of theoretical perspectives in narrative theory (e.g., Bruner, 1986, 1990), reader-response theory (e.g., Rosenblatt, 1978), and critical literacy (e.g., Lankshear & McLaren, 1993). Integrating ideas and constructs from whole language with these theoretical perspectives provided the basis for constructing a literate community of readers and writers—one in which literacy was understood as not only the ability to comprehend or communicate messages and feelings, but the means through which children could engage in a process of reflection that enabled them to explore, understand, and perhaps change themselves and their worlds. To this

end, children were often engaged in activities designed to help them share and discuss their reasons for reading or writing particular texts. Underlying this perspective was the idea that becoming proficient readers or writers involves exploring and exploiting some of the critical possibilities afforded by reading and writing.

Although these combined theoretical perspectives served as a starting point for curricular ideas and decisions, the specific nature of the reading and writing that took place in the classroom was developed and negotiated with the children over time. As co-constructors of these activities and architects of the classroom community, the children were frequently involved in rethinking the organization and sequence of daily literacy activities, the spatial organization of the classroom, the structure of social organization and interpersonal relationships in the classroom, and the kinds of reading and writing activities that they would find interesting and meaningful.

Two key events helped to initiate and anchor the development of the instructional program in this classroom. At the beginning of the year, children were invited to plan and video tape a tour of the neighborhood where they lived and attended school. During the tour, children offered extensive commentary about a variety of local landmarks that had particular meaning for them (e.g., churches, homes of relatives and friends, favorite restaurants, parks, abandoned homes, and local hang-outs). This commentary included historical information about featured landmarks, as well as information about the personal, communal, and political significance of these sites.

Children were also involved in constructing a number of colorful "signs" or posters about their community. In constructing these "signs of community life," as the teacher referred to them, children were encouraged to reflect upon and share those aspects of their community that they wished to celebrate, as well as those they wished to transform. Throughout the school year, children continued to draw upon both the "neighborhood tour" and the "community-signs activity" as sources for future written work.

As the year progressed, children continued to write about themselves, their families, their community, and their culture. Much of this writing was self-initiated as children grew less dependent upon their teacher to supply them with ideas and topics for their writing. Numerous

other changes to the structure of the classroom were also made in order to support the children's development as writers and their desire to work collaboratively. For example, children were provided with opportunities to write with partners on a daily basis. In order to facilitate these collaborations, the teacher spent some time each day raising and discussing questions regarding students' roles and responsibilities as readers and editors of other students' writing. During this time, the teacher also provided children with instruction pertaining to specific aspects of their writing by conducting one-on-one or small group conferences while they wrote.

The classroom was changed further with the development of a "sharing corner"—a carpeted corner in the rear of the classroom that was designed as a place for reading and discussing one another's written work. Children were also involved in publishing a bi-monthly in-class "magazine." As part of the publishing process, and on a rotating basis, all children worked as editors for this "magazine." Each week several new children were chosen to serve in editorial roles. During their editorial meetings, which were sometimes attended by a researcher, these children discussed the writing of their peers, generated suggestions for revisions, and decided which student writing would be included in the classroom magazine during the following week.

In addition to these and other writing-related experiences, children were also provided with a variety of books for independent reading. These books represented a range of genres and topics of interest to the children. In fact, many of the books in the classroom library had actually been chosen by the children. At the beginning of each day, children were usually provided with time to read silently from their books, and they were encouraged to respond to these books in reading-response journals. Each day, three or four children were invited to share entries from their reading-response journals, and the other children in the class were invited to discuss these entries.

Children were also engaged in many small-group and whole-class reading activities with the teacher. Within these activities, the teacher often encouraged children to reflect on and share their feelings in response to particular texts (e.g., "How did the story make you feel?" "What did the story make you think?"). She also encouraged them to explore the reasons why an author might have written a particular piece (e.g., "Why do you think this author wrote their story?" "What did

they want us to think, know, or do?" "Are they trying to change our minds about anything?"). Finally, children were invited to examine the nature of the authoring process (e.g., "What do authors do when they write a book of story?" "What do we do when we write our own stories?").

Data and Data Collection

Data for this study were collected in the context of a two year ethnographic investigation in the classroom just described. The first author visited the children's classroom four days a month from November to May both to observe and to participate in children's shared reading activities, individual and collaborative writing sessions, and peer editing sessions. Other researchers also visited the classroom on a regular basis throughout the year. During classroom visits, the researchers engaged in several modes of data collection including interviewing children, interviewing the teacher, collecting copies of children's written texts and children's reading-response journals, tape-recording collaborative writing activities and peer editing sessions, and composing field notes of many classroom activities. All of the data constituted the interpretive context for understanding the children's engagement in reading and writing. Only the reading-response journals of the case-study children and the in-depth interviews with these children were analyzed for this study.

Throughout the school year, a considerable amount of time was devoted to self-selected reading each day. Early in the school year the children had been asked about the topics that most interested them, and the classroom library had been stocked with age appropriate books on these topics. Among the topics that most interested children were famous African Americans, sports, friends, family, animals, and adventure. Children were provided with composition books and were asked to keep track of the books that they read, how much they had liked these books, and why they liked them. Throughout the year, both the teacher and the researchers conferenced with the children about their responses to the literature that they read. During these conferences, children were reminded to respond to their reading by recording whatever thoughts, feelings, or reactions they wished to remember and share as a result of reading a particular book. Copies of all children's reading-response journals were collected at the end of the school year.

In-depth interviews were conducted with the case-study children by the first author on a monthly basis, beginning on the fifth week of the study and continuing throughout the remainder of the school year. A total of five interviews were conducted with each child. Interviews varied in length from approximately 30 to 60 minutes. Importantly, interviews took the form of "conversations" and were designed to engage children in thinking and talking about the meanings and functions that they associated with reading or writing particular texts. In developing and conducting the interviews, we were informed by Mishler's (1986) work which defines the distinct qualities and strengths of dialogic interviewing as a method of inquiry in the human sciences. Specifically, Mishler argues that traditional stimulus-response models of the interview process are essentially flawed in their requirement of standardization of meaning for questions and responses. Such a requirement fails to acknowledge "the ways that the meanings of questions and responses are contextually grounded and jointly constructed by interviewer and respondent" (p. 34). Alternatively, in conceptualizing interviews as jointly produced discourses, Mishler openly acknowledges the interviewer's participation in the respondent's construction of meaning. He describes the interview as a process that engages researchers and informants in continual reformulations and negotiations of questions and responses in order to arrive together at meanings that both can understand.

Although certain questions were used to begin each interview and other questions typically emerged as the most interesting and revealing, the interviewer allowed children to control the flow of conversation as much as possible. More specifically, during each interview children were first asked to review the reading and writing they had done since the previous interview and to identify those written texts they wished to talk about. Children's reading-response journals and their writing folders served as reminders of past work. Once children had identified some texts of interest, they often took control of the interview, volunteering information about the specific content of focal texts. In response, children were often asked questions designed to help them elaborate their responses. These questions included: "What else could you tell me about this

'story'?" "And then what happened in the 'story'?" "Is there anything else you would like to tell me about it?"

Three additional kinds of questions were usually asked in our conversations with the children. One kind of question invited children to discuss their reasons for choosing to read or write particular texts. These questions enabled children to reflect upon and discuss how reading or writing certain texts related to their personal experiences. Typical questions included: "Could you tell me why you chose to read/write this text?" "I'm wondering what made you want to read/write this text?" I'm curious about what gave you the idea to read/write this text?"

Another kind of question scaffolded children's ability to ponder and discuss what they were thinking or feeling while reading or writing. Some common questions included: "Could you tell me what you were thinking about while you were reading/writing?" "As you read this, did you ever think about yourself or other people you know?" "How did you feel while you were reading/writing?" "Is there anything that you really liked or disliked about this text?" "What did you like the most/least about this text?"

A third kind of question helped children to explore the specific meaning and importance they associated with reading or writing a given text. These questions asked children to elaborate upon responses to earlier questions. Some typical questions included: "I'm interested in why you like to write about Black heroes?" "Why were you thinking about your friends in first grade when you read this? "Can you remember why you felt happy when you read that part?" "Does that character remind you of anyone you know?" "I'm curious about why that character reminds you of your sister?" "Why does that story make you think about your own life or family?" "Does the writing this help you in any way?" Each interview was concluded when students seemed to have little more to say about the texts being discussed.

Data Coding and Analyses

Based on an extensive review of the literature on the functions of reading and writing enacted by children and adolescents, along with results from an analysis of a subset of the children's interview transcripts, a taxonomy of the personal, social, and political functions of

children's reading and writing was developed (Kamberelis & McGinley, 1991, see Appendix A). The process of developing this taxonomy was iterative. We began with over 40 coding categories, which were eventually reduced to 20. Once this taxonomy was developed, children's reading-response journals and their interview transcripts were coded by one of the researchers for the functions embedded within them. Twenty-five percent of the journals and transcripts were coded independently by a second researcher. Interrater agreement was 92%. Disagreements were resolved by consensus.

The unit of analysis used for coding the interview transcripts and reading-response journals consisted of a comment about a particular function that a child assigned to a text that he or she had read or written. These comments ranged in length from a few words to a few sentences. Multiple comments about a single function that focused on a single topic or theme within a single text were considered to be a single comment and coded accordingly. For example, if a child mentioned several different times that he or she had identified with a hero or character in a particular book, the entire collection of comments was coded as a single token of the function we identified as "Explore or Celebrate Possible Selves or Role Models." However, if a child invoked a single function several times in relation to multiple topics or foci within a particular text or several different texts, the function was coded as having occurred more than once. For example, if within a given interview, a child talked about identifying with characters from several different books, each comment was coded as a separate token of "Explore or Celebrate Possible Selves or Role Models."

Once all interview transcripts and reading-response journals were coded, they were analyzed descriptively for the percentages of different functions children assigned to their reading and writing. Only those comments that referred to coded functions were included in the analyses. Percentages of comments that referred to specific functions were computed in relation to the total number of coded comments. Analyses of coded comments were organized in three ways. First, distributions of the overall personal, social, and political functions enacted by all five children were examined. Second, distributions of the individual functions within these overall categories (personal, social, and political) were explored, paying particular attention to the most salient functions enacted by the

children. Finally, the unique ways in which two of the case-study children enacted and integrated various functions in the context of their reading and writing were investigated.

Results and Discussion

Several patterns of results are presented. First, we present findings from the analyses of the global functional categories (personal, social, and political) aggregated across all five case-study children. Second, we present findings from the analyses of individual functions within these global functional categories. In particular, we focus on the most salient individual functions enacted by children and the ways in which these functions are distributed across acts of reading and writing. Third, we present interpretive profiles of two of the case-study children, highlighting the unique ways that they used reading and writing to understand and transform personal, social, and political dimensions of their lives.

An Overview of the Personal, Social, and Political Functions of Reading and Writing Enacted by the Children in this Study

Table 1 contains the percentages of the global personal, social, and political functions that students associated with acts of reading and writing. Percentages were calculated within the categories of reading and writing, as well as across these categories. As indicated in the table, the overwhelming percentage of children's reading and writing was centered around personal functions such as understanding their present selves, their problems, and their futures (73.6%). A considerable percentage of children's reading and writing was associated with social functions (16.1%) such as understanding, affirming, or negotiating social relationships in their immediate worlds. Finally, a small percentage of children's reading and writing was associated with political functions (10.3%), such as understanding social issues and reflecting upon ways to transform social problems in their own communities and society as a whole.

Table 1 also illustrates how the personal, social, and political functions invoked by children were distributed differently across reading and writing. Specifically, the percentage of children's interview comments indicates that they tended to invoke personal functions more often in connection with reading (83.2%) than writing (62.9%). By contrast, children tended to enact

particular social functions more often in connection with writing (24.7%) than reading (8.4%). Finally, children tended to engage in political functions slightly more often during writing (12.3%) than reading (8.4%).

Insert Table 1 about here

Although organizing the findings in this way provides insight into general trends, it may gloss individual differences in the extent to which particular functions were enacted. To examine how these general patterns were associated with the patterns from individual children, we also organized the findings according to the distributions of the global personal, social, and political functions enacted by each child. These distributions are presented in Table 2. It is clear from this table that individual children were more or less loquacious in their interview responses and that some children were unique with respect to the enactment of particular functions. However, both the patterns of enacting various global functions and the ways that these functions were distributed across reading and writing modes bore a considerable number of family resemblance's to the patterns found in the aggregated data. More specifically, all children enacted personal functions more than social and political functions, and they enacted these personal functions more often in association with reading than with writing. Albeit with considerable variability, all but one child enacted social functions more than political functions. Similarly, all but one child associated social functions more with writing than with reading. Children demonstrated the greatest degree of variability in the enactment of political functions, both in terms of how often they enacted these functions and the ways in which they did so in relation to reading and writing modes. Specifically all but one child enacted political functions less often than social functions, and political functions were associated with writing more than reading for three of the five children. The opposite was the case for the other two children.

Insert Table 2 about here

We conducted additional analyses to examine the specific kinds of personal, social, and political functions associated with children's reading and writing. Table 3 contains a summary of the distributions of specific functions within the global categories of personal, social, and political functions. The eight most commonly occurring functions within and across reading and writing modes are discussed below, beginning with ones enacted most often. Excerpts from children's interview transcripts are also presented and annotated to illustrate how children invoked each of these functions. Three overall patterns were obtained with respect to the distribution of specific functions across reading and writing. Some commonly occurring functions were associated primarily with reading. Other commonly occurring functions were associated primarily with writing. Still other commonly occurring functions were associated more or less equally with reading and writing.

Insert Table 3 about here

As indicated in the table, the function most often enacted by children was "Explore or Celebrate Possible Selves or Role Models," and this function was enacted more often in relation to reading than writing. In the context of talking about the books entitled I Have a Dream: The Story of Martin (Davidson, 1991) and Encyclopedia Brown Gets His Man (Sobol, 1982), Jamar explained how the protagonists in these books encouraged him to envision possible roles and future responsibilities for himself:

> They make me think that I want to, that I could help the community or go up in space or be a actor or have all three. I have three choices to choose from, helping the community, going up in space, or being an actor. . . . See, if I think about my life, I only think about

being an actor, but if I read Encyclopedia Brown or a book about Martin Luther King or Abraham Lincoln, then it helps me to think about different things instead of being an actor.

This function was also embodied in Edward's remarks about a story that he had written entitled Basketball, which appears in Appendix B. In this story, Edward reconstructed the events of a basketball game at school in which he had played. In this reconstruction, he highlighted how he had stolen the ball from a friend on the other team and almost scored a basket. "Stealing the ball from a friend" was an event hardly ever experienced by Edward, and "almost scoring a basket" bordered on hyperbole as well. Yet, in talking about his story, Edward was quite specific about the kind of possible self that he envisioned. It was a self in which average or below average performances would be transformed into exceptional ones:

> [When I wrote this] I was thinking I could play good like one of them players, like John Salley. . . . It made me feel like I picture where they're playing, and when I grow up I'm gonna play college basketball all the way to the NBA.

Another function that children enacted quite often was "Provide Personal Enjoyment and Entertainment," and they enacted this function almost exclusively in relation to reading. For example, Ricardo was quite animated in discussing how much he had enjoyed reading The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse (Stevens, 1987), a book about that contrasts country life and city life from the perspectives of two friendly mice:

> I liked it. It was exciting. . . . First they went to this house, and the town mouse asked [the country mouse] did he have something to eat? So he [the country mouse] said, "let's go over to the cow." He [the city mouse] said, "what's the cow gonna do for lunch?" He [the country mouse] said, "we could drink milk for lunch." And then they went to the pig, he [the city mouse] said, "what the pig got for lunch?". . . . It was fun.

Edward provided another example of enjoying and being entertained by what he read. While talking about the book, Lulu Goes to Witch School (O'Connor, 1987), a fantasy about two young witches who meet at "witch school" and eventually become friends, Edward said:

I liked it 'cause I like, uh, I liked that they was singing songs, and then they was whispering about witches, and I liked it; that's all. And I liked it that they had special lockers, but it wasn't like lockers. Well it was like a jail, kind of like, but no bars, and they put they hats and brooms and stuff in there.

Children also associated the function "Remember or Savor Personal Experiences" quite often in relation to their acts of reading and writing. For example, Ricardo wrote a personal narrative entitled My Life (see Appendix C). This narrative embodied three themes: his success in school, the loneliness associated with being an only child, and his grief in relation to his grandfather's death. While discussing this narrative, he focused almost exclusively on this last theme:

I was thinking about my life and stuff. . . . And I think about how my grandfather did stuff with me. I wanted to tell about how he did things with me. . . . My grandfather sometimes he came and picked me up from school when I was little. And so when I write, it makes me think about him.

Interestingly, important social relationships were a primary focus of much of Ricardo's reading and writing. For example, many of the books that Ricardo wrote about in his reading-response journal dealt with topics such as mother animals caring for their young, parents who care for and spend time with their children, and children who get along and help each other.

The ways in which children used reading to remember or savor personal experiences was also illustrated nicely in Jamar's remarks about the book, Ramona the Pest (Cleary, 1968), a story about the exploits of a first-grade girl named Ramona Quimby:

When I read the Ramona book it helps me to think about the times, the good times I had when I was in kindergarten and first grade and Ramona she fell in love with a boy named David and she would chase him around the playground every morning. . . . And it, I like to think about my memories, 'cause it takes me back to a time that I can go back to again.

Children also found reading and writing to be a useful way to "Objectify or Reconcile Problematic Emotions." In relation to this function, Jamar described how an essay that he wrote

entitled Emergency (see Appendix D) enabled him to deal with his thoughts and feelings regarding a frightening incident of drug-related violence that he experienced in his own home. In his words:

> When I wrote it down, I felt better because I was always, before I wrote it down I was always scared. . . . I was still scared just a couple of weeks after it happened. . . . 'Cause I kept all this fear inside me, but when I wrote it down I just let it out. . . . I felt better about writing it than keeping it a secret 'cause I wasn't scared anymore.

Similarly, Edward explained how reading the book Lulu Goes to Witch School (O'Connor, 1987) helped him to deal with the problematic emotions he experienced in relation to a conflict he recently had during recess at school:

> She [the character named Sandy] made me think of Billy and Ricardo. Sometimes, they fuss with me, and one morning Ricardo was throwing me out the door 'cause he was just playing with me. He was happy, but it started hurting and he started laughing, and my friend came and got him off me. [The story] made me remember what Ricardo did, and now I know that I can tell the teacher or something, 'cause I couldn't see nothing down there. I just heard somebody picking him off me, and then I looked, and it was my friend.

Reading Lulu Goes to Witch School, which reminded Edward of a problematic social experience mediated by one of his friends, seemed to engender in him a process of reflecting on the value of friendship. Indeed, friendships were a common theme in the books that Edward chose to read, and he pursued this theme in several essays that he wrote about his friends and his mother. Additionally, more than the other children in the study, Edward frequently enacted another function that complemented "Objectify or Reconcile Problematic Emotions." This function was "Envision Possible Events to Mitigate Present Problems," and he was particularly prone to enact this function in relation to his own perceived inadequacies in sports. Recall, for example, Edward's personal narrative, Basketball, and his comments about eventually developing the competence of a professional basketball player.

To a somewhat lesser extent than some other salient functions, children enacted the function "Understand or Negotiate Social Relationships in One's World" in the context of writing,

and occasionally in the context of reading. Billy's comments about a story that he wrote entitled Me and a New Friend (see Appendix E) illustrate how he used writing to affirm and strengthen his new friendship with a boy named Nicholas:

> When I first met Nicholas, I wanted to be friends with him out of the whole school. [The story I wrote] makes me think about when Nicholas and me were on the playground in school. . . . When he reads it, I think he would like to be my best friend.

Negotiating and affirming social relationships was also a common subtext in much of Billy's writing. Among the texts that he composed included biographical sketches of famous African Americans such as Rosa Parks, Frederick Douglas, Harriett Tubman, Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X. When he talked about these texts, he often mentioned experiences and relationships that some of his family members had with these individuals in the context of the Civil Rights Movement.

Edward also illustrated the enactment of this function in the context of an essay that he wrote entitled Jamar (see Appendix F). In this essay he affirmed his relationship with Jamar by informing other members of his class about his feelings toward his friend:

> [I wrote it] because Jamar is my best friend, and he always help me with stuff that I need help on. . . . I want to get this in the magazine (a collection of student writing "published" in a special corner of the room). And then everybody in the classroom can go up there and look at the board. . . . Um, they'll learn who's my best friend, and now they know that's my best friend. And they know my name and if I'm in trouble, some, and, like all the kids in my classroom, like if my cousin came up to school and knew I was in trouble, and he couldn't do nothin', he can go get Jamar, and maybe Jamar can do something about it.

Children also revealed how reading and writing functioned as way for them to "Self-Consciously Celebrate Literate Values and Practices." This function was evident in many of Tanya's general remarks about her writing and reading:

> It makes me feel pretty good like when I'm writing, except when I have to reread it. Really, when I'm writing I just write whatever I think, and then when I get to reading, I

have different mistakes to fix. But I still feel pretty good when I write. . . . And when people read my writing they probably think that . . . or say to somebody else, "she probably really knows about things and she probably likes to read a lot of things about herself." I'd like people to think that , like saying in their minds that this child or this girl likes to write about Black famous people. . . . And the people I write about, like Martin Luther King, he probably be proud of it that I wrote about him.

Children also associated both reading and writing with the function "Understand or Raise Awareness of Social Problems and Injustice." For example, after reading the biography, I Have a Dream: The Story of Martin (Davidson, 1991), Jamar told us that he had found the book to be meaningful because it raised his awareness of the causes of racial conflict:

> Deena [a classmate and a friend] read this book, and I found it interesting because it had a lot of things I never new about Dr. Martin Luther King 'cause he had two White friends and their mother told them they couldn't see him (Martin) anymore 'cause he was Black and they was White. . . . And he (Martin's father) needed to buy his son some shoes but then the clerk came in front of them and told them they need to sit in the back of the room, and he got angry and left. . . . Black people, when they were in that time, they weren't treated right.

Foregrounding the transformative potential of written language, Tanya described how she hoped that her essay, Non-Violence (see Appendix G), might "Transform People's Values or Beliefs about Social Problems" and perhaps even mobilize them to change their lives:

> I asked my mother what is violence and she said 'something I never want to do'. . . . But sometimes I walk, or sometimes when I go to school I see people real close to each other and I just get scared, and I walk faster, and sometimes I get scared and I'll think people shouldn't be scared to walk up and down the street, like in their neighborhoods. The should feel safe. . . . [When I wrote this] it made me feel like to just go and tell people or ask people, 'please don't do violence anymore,' or something like that. I was asking them.

Almost exclusively in the context of reading, children invoked the function "Experience or Participate in Imaginary Worlds and Lives." For example, while talking about the story Secrets Aren't Always for Keeps (Aiello, 1989), Tanya illustrated how she used reading to imaginatively participate in the lives and worlds of fictional characters:

> I liked that book because, first of all, it's a girl, it's mostly talking about mostly all girls. And secondly, is that when I read this book it gave me a feeling that I had a pen pal right next to me or I was writing a story. I was writing them a letter or making me an add out to get a pen pal. . . . Every time I looked over it [the book] it felt like I just had a pen pal right next to me, reading the book with me.

Similarly, as Jamar talked about reading the story St. George and the Dragon (Hodges, 1990), he revealed how reading enabled him to vicariously experience the "lived worlds" of characters from a time and place quite removed from his own:

> The story made me feel that I'd like to be both characters in the story. I would like to beat the dragon, and I would like to be the dragon. I'd like to know how it feels to be something, a giant animal, but then you're defeated by a little person. I'd like to know how it feels to be like, crush cities and stuff, but not hurt people.

As these findings indicate, children's engagement in reading and writing was associated with a wide range of specific personal, social, and political functions. Children used reading and writing to explore new roles and social identities, to understand and negotiate human experiences, to wrestle with vexing social and political issues, and to engage in efforts designed to transform their lives and their worlds. The findings also revealed how specific personal, social, and political functions enacted by children were distributed differently across reading and writing modes. Some functions were enacted primarily during reading; others were invoked primarily within acts of writing; still others occurred more or less equally in relation to both reading and writing.

Zooming Down: Tales of Two Readers and Writers

Although the foregoing overview allowed us to thematize and discuss the functions most commonly invoked by children within their acts of reading and writing, it could not articulate how

individual children developed unique repertoires of personal, social, and political functions. Nor could such an overview demonstrate how particular children appropriated and orchestrated various functions in complex and complementary ways. In this section, we attempt to address these lacunae by contextualizing our thematized functions within interpretive accounts of two of the case-study children. Through these accounts, we foreground the unique and powerful ways in which these children appropriated and orchestrated specific personal, social, and political functions. In constructing these accounts, we have relied primarily on children's interview responses. However, we have augmented the information provided in these responses with some of the children's written texts, excerpts from their reading-response journals, and information contained within our field notes.

Jamar and Tanya are the two children whose case-study profiles we have chosen to present here. Our only real constraint in selecting these two children was that we wanted to include both a boy and a girl. Since Tanya was the only girl who remained in the study for its entire duration, her profile is presented. Jamar was chosen at random from the group of boys. Although his case-study profile is unique, it is neither richer nor more interesting than the profiles of the other boys in the study with the possible exception James, who was a fairly reticent child and tended not be quite as engaged as the other children in his interactions with adults. Tables 4 and 5 present the percentages of specific personal, social, and political functions enacted respectively by Jamar and Tanya. Unlike the previous tables, which contained only the results from the interviews with children, Tables 4 and 5 contain the results from analyzing their interviews and reader-response journals. We draw upon some of the information in these tables in constructing case-study profiles for these two children. Within these profiles, we summarize the overall patterns of the commonly practiced functions for each child, and we highlight the ways that each child appropriated and integrated certain constellations of functions.

Jamar. Jamar was a thoughtful and soft-spoken third-grade boy who readily shared his thoughts and feelings with us about the reading and writing in which he was involved. Soon after we met Jamar, he informed us that his mother thought he was "a very creative person," because he

could always "make up a story" while he played with his toy "super heroes" at home. Seldom without a book to read or a story to tell, Jamar read and wrote about a wide range of different topics some of which included knights and dragons, space travel, endangered animals, homelessness, racial injustice, African-American leaders, rocks and minerals, detectives, his family, and his friends. Table 4 presents the specific personal, social, and political functions embodied in Jamar's interview comments, reader-response journal entries, and written texts . In general, Jamar's reading and writing was associated with some of the more commonly occurring personal functions enacted by all of the case-study children (i.e., "Provide Personal Enjoyment and Entertainment" and "Experience or Participate in Imaginary Worlds and Lives"). In addition, Jamar routinely enacted several personal and political functions. These included "Objectify or Reconcile Problematic Emotions," "Understand or Raise Awareness of Social Problems and Injustice," and "Transform People's Values or Beliefs about Social Problems." Perhaps more important than Jamar's gravitation toward these particular functions were the unique and complementary ways that he coordinated these functions. Finally, through his explicit enactment of these functions, Jamar was also implicitly engaged in "Self Consciously Celebrating Literate Values and Practices" and "Exploring or Celebrating Possible Selves or Role Models."

Insert Table 4 about here

Over the course of the school year, Jamar's reading and writing often served as a way for him to understand and attempt to address certain problematic emotions and concerns, especially in relation to the social problems and conditions that he encountered in his community. Recall, for instance, our previous discussion of how Jamar invoked this particular function in relation to writing the essay entitled Emergency. One story that Jamar read and found particularly meaningful in this regard was Maniac MacGee (Spinelli, 1991), a story about the experiences of a young orphan boy struggling to understand the problems that divided Black and White residents of the

small town in which he lived. In discussing this book, Jamar disclosed his own feelings and confusion about being part of an African American family and also having a White grandmother:

> When we read Maniac MacGee I think about how it would be if I had some, a White sister, and I was Black, and people didn't understand why I had a White family, White people in my family. And I did have a White person in my family. See my grandmother, I used to have two grandmas and one of 'em died. I mean I used to have THREE grandmas, and one of 'em died, so I have two grandmas now. And um, I had a White grandma, that was my mother's, that was my mother's mother, but she died. And then I think about it. My mother tells me stories about her and her [White] mother, my grandma, and it make me feel good.
>
> I feel better, because my mother, I read books about segregated times, and then, then I have a White person in my family, so then the White person dies. And it makes me feel better, and I understand segregated times because I had a White person in my family.

Although the connections that Jamar made between his own life and the life of Maniac MaGee were only partially explicit, they indexed his abiding concern with understanding social problems such as drug-related violence, racial prejudice, inter-racial relationships, and inter-group conflict, as well as his attempts to envision solutions to these problems. Indeed, he revisited these themes in much of his reading and writing, in conversations with us and with many of his age-mates, and in his contributions to class discussions. For example, in an essay that he wrote entitled What I Think of Martin Luther King, Jamar wrestled with some of the complex issues surrounding inter-racial relationships and inter-group conflict much more explicitly. The following excerpt from Jamar's essay illustrates this point:

> Martin Luther King Jr., is the person who saved blacks from the bad hands of the whites but not all whites are bad because I have white friends and some of those white friends are Deena and Mark. It's not the color of your skin that matters but what you think and feel for others.

Jamar also used writing as a means to objectify or reconcile problematic emotions in relation to particular social problems. One text that was especially significant in this regard was his essay,

Poor People, which appears in Appendix H. In discussing the essay, Jamar focused on his own emotional response to numerous encounters that he had with homeless people in his neighborhood, as well as how he used writing to deal with these emotions:

> I see a lot of poor people when I walk down the street. Sometimes I be seeing them when I walk to school or I'm going to my friends house, I see a poor person . . . I feel sorry for a poor person 'cause they don't have nothing to eat or nothing.
>
> 'Cause, when a poor person comes asking for money, like when I was with my grandma once, and she was getting gas, this poor person came up to the car and asked, could he pump the gas for her? 'Cause he didn't have no money, he wanted to, he wanted a couple of dollars.
>
> When I wrote about poor people it helps me to release my feelings 'cause I feel sorry for a poor person and it helps me to feel better if I write about it.

Jamar's use of reading and writing to objectify and reconcile problematic emotions was closely related to the ways in which he used reading to enhance his knowledge and understanding of particular social problems affecting African Americans. In discussing the book entitled, I Have a Dream: The Story of Martin (Davidson, 1991), Jamar noted how it had raised his awareness and understanding of the roots of social injustice and inter-group conflict:

> Deena [a classmate and friend] read this book, I Have a Dream, and I found it interesting because it had a lot of things that I never knew about Dr. Martin Luther King 'cause he had two white friends and their mother told them they couldn't see him (Martin) anymore 'cause he was Black and they was White. . . . And he (Martin Luther King Sr.) needed to buy his son some shoes, but then the clerk came in front of them and told them they need to sit in the back of the room, and he got angry and left. . . . Black people, when they were in that time, they weren't treated right.

Complementing his interest in learning about social problems through acts of reading, Jamar often used writing to assume a critical proactive stance in relation to these social problems (Kamberelis & Scott, 1992; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Madigan, 1992; McGinley &

Kamberelis, 1992). For example, while talking about how the act of writing Poor People had helped him come to grips with his own emotional response to the homeless people in his neighborhood, he also described how the he thought the essay might transform the values and attitudes of other people with regard to poverty and homelessness:

> I would like other people to think about, I would like them to like it. And I wish that it [Poor People] would change their lives and make it that they would help out poor people. Maybe they would have a change of heart. That it would be right to help a poor person. 'Cause if you write something, and you really put your mind to it, and it's about something that happens everyday, somebody might have a change of heart.

Jamar's belief in the potential of writing to change people's values and attitudes about social problems was also reflected in his response to the written work of other students in his school. For example, after reading a student essay on handgun violence and handgun control that had been published in a classroom anthology, Jamar composed the following entry in his reading-response journal:

> This book has meaning aspshaly (especially) the person who wrote the story, Guns. He or she was right guns do kill people. And we have guns I think people shold lock them up. And I think the whole world should read this book. This book is very good example to what happens in this world today it is scary.

Through re-enunciating and affirming the message of Guns, Jamar seemed to identify and strengthen his own convictions about the problem of handgun violence in our society. Additionally, in declaring that "the whole world should read this book," Jamar seemed to underscore his belief in the transformative power of written language. This power, here experienced through reading Guns, soon exerted an intertextual influence on Jamar's own writing. Not long after composing his reaction to Guns, Jamar wrote an essay entitled Dwain (see Figure 1). In this essay, he simultaneously celebrated his developing identity as a writer and the power of writing to combat social ills.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Dwain, and many other essays and stories that Jamar wrote, were emblematic of the transformative potential that he associated with writing and being a writer, as well as the "activist" orientation that he often assumed in relation to things about the world that he found problematic or less than desirable. Interestingly, this activism took may forms that ranged from more serious to more playful, and he often combined the these two modes of engagement within individual texts. Recall, for example, that one of the "possible selves" that Jamar imagined for himself was to be an astronaut. In a story/essay that he wrote called I Want to Visit Space (see Figure 2), Jamar demonstrated that his investment in being an astronaut was quite complex, involving both the somewhat merry possibility of notoriety and "Top Gun" glory and the more serious-minded possibility of discovering solutions to real-world problems through the conduct of extraterrestrial research. As was the case with much of Jamar's writing, I Want to Visit Space became an arena in which the complexity of possible roles, possible worlds, and the relations among them could be imagined and rehearsed.

Insert Figure 2 about here

In sum, Jamar was unique in his complex and complementary appropriation of several personal and political functions. He engaged in both reading and writing to work out problematic emotions connected with certain social problems. He read many books to gain new knowledge about the recent history and origins of these problems. And he engaged in acts of writing as vehicles for envisioning solutions to prevailing social conditions and as a catalyst for changing them. As Jamar enacted these three functions through reading and writing, he also enacted two others. He celebrated his own identity as a literate being, and he traced the contours of potential future selves and involvements in the world.

Tanya. Tanya was a fourth-grade girl who freely shared her thoughts and opinions with us about the texts that she had read and written. During these discussions, she delighted in telling stories about her life at home, her family members and friends, her hopes and visions for her future, and some of the everyday joys and problems of a young girl growing up and going to school in a large urban area. Like Jamar, Tanya read and wrote on a variety of topics including mysteries, science, animals, memorable personal experiences (e.g., birthday parties and summer picnics), and her community, family, and friends. However, her most intense involvements with reading and writing focused on the personal histories and life experiences of important African Americans, and the meanings of these histories and experiences for her own life. Table 5 presents a summary of the specific personal, social, and political functions embodied in Tanya's interview comments and reading-response journal entries. As this table shows, Tanya enacted some of the same functions common to other case-study children (i.e., "Provide Personal Enjoyment and Entertainment" and "Experience or Participate in Imaginary Worlds and Lives"). Additionally, Tanya regularly enacted several other functions (i.e., "Remember or Savor Personal Experiences, "Explore or Celebrate Possible Selves or Role Models," "Understand or Negotiate Social Relationships in One's World, "Self-Consciously Celebrate Literate Values and Practices," and "Forge a Moral Code for Oneself"), and she was unique in her complex and complementary coordination of these functions.

Tanya read several books during the school year through which she was simultaneously engaged in "Remembering or Savoring Personal Experiences" and "Understanding and/or Negotiating Social Relationships," particularly in relation to friendships. Lulu Goes to Witch School (O'Connor, 1987) was one of these books. This story is about a young girl named Lulu and the difficulties she encountered with Sandy, another young girl who picks on Lulu during their first days at "witch school." In talking about this book, Tanya focused on how the experiences of Lulu and Sandy related to some of her own experiences:

Umm, it [the book] made me laugh, and it was talking about school, and how she [Lulu] was. . . . I liked how it began where she was in school 'cause it was just like me when I went to school that first day, everybody picking on me.

It brought back memories, when I was little, not when I was little, back when people, when I was picking on people and people picked on me. . . . When I first read the first part of the book, it was talking about Lulu going to witch school and I predict, I said in my mind that this might be how my life was when I first came to school. . . . And as I read on, it [the story] kept talking about how I was when I first came to school.

And then it came to the part where Mary (a new student that had just arrived in Tanya's class) came to school, and I started, started thinking on her (Mary). And then it went on and on, and started, then we started being friends.

Clearly, Lulu Goes to Witch School provided Tanya with an occasion to remember and savor the moment when she and her friend, Mary, began to forge an important friendship—one that helped both girls mitigate the fears and confusion associated with their first days at a new school. What is particularly interesting about Tanya's comments is that they reveal how the fictional story that she is reading and her own personal narrative interanimated one another (Bakhtin, 1981; Booth, 1988; Friere & Macedo, 1987). Reading Lulu Goes to Witch School became a catalyst for dramatizing, and therefore reconstructing, a key past event in Tanya's life, and for ratcheting up her understanding of the meaning of "friendship." At the same time, reconstructing that past event functioned to scaffold Tanya's understanding and interpretation of the story. This process was indexed in Tanya's use of the word "it" to refer simultaneously (and perhaps ambiguously) to both the fictional story and her own life-history narrative. Similarly, this process was instantiated in Tanya's seamless substitution of "I" for "Lulu" and "Mary" for "Sandy." The fictional protagonists and the real-life girls coalesced within the experience of reading and in the reanimation of that experience.

Although Tanya probably was not always explicitly aware of forging connections between art and life, she betrayed some awareness of this process on occasion. For example, while

discussing one of the mystery stories from the series, Encyclopedia Brown, she commented, "It seems like I'm in the story when I read it." Similarly, while discussing her experience of reading a biography of Harriet Tubman, she noted, "I felt like I was right there, when she was freeing her people, and I was one of the people that she freed, and I was thanking her so much." Finally, after reading a small collection of plays, Tanya wrote in her reading-response journal that she "felt like jumping in the book because it is so real to me."

Tanya's engagement in reading and writing also functioned as a vehicle for exploring and envisioning possible selves, especially in relation to certain African American celebrities and role models. Tanya was particularly attracted to books about the lives of African American women, and she read many such books during the school year. Among the most memorable for Tanya were biographies of Josephine Baker, Leontyne Price, Diana Ross, Sojourner Truth, and Harriet Tubman. In discussing the book, Diana Ross: Star Supreme (Haskins, 1986), Tanya emphasized how the story had prompted her to reflect on her own life and to imagine possibilities for her future:

> This book made me feel happy because I like the way she sings . . . I think famous people were very special because, um, some famous people helped others be famous and some famous people just made me feel happy. . . . I like Black singers or famous people because some Blacks are, maybe I could understand Blacks more than Whites. Or different kinds of, um, different kinds of people.
>
> I think they [Diana Ross and Martin Luther King, Jr.] were good people when they, like Dr. Martin Luther King, I think he was a good man. Or a good person when he was living. . . . Like when I grow up, I'll probably be a singer or a preacher or somebody like Dr. Martin Luther King or Diana Ross. . . . I think it will be like something special in my life.

Tanya also wrote about the biography of Diana Ross in her reading-response journal, emphasizing the qualities of independence and self-respect that she admired in the singer. Tanya began her journal entry by copying a passage from the biography that described the family circumstances and living conditions of Diana Ross' childhood. Then she paraphrased another

portion of the biography that juxtaposed the Diana Ross' view of her home with the "gaze" of the mainstream world. Finally, Tanya provided her own commentary on Diana Ross' character:

> "After Diana [was born] came three boys and another girl. They all lived in a small apartment on the third floor of an old apartment house in the northern part of Detroit, Michigan. All the children slept together in one bedroom." I can see that being hard to sleep. The outsiders of Diana's neighborhood called it a ghetto, but Diana called it home. I really think Diana stood up for herself very well.

Tanya also celebrated the independence and self-respect of African American women through her reading of the book Ragtime Tumpie, (Schroeder, 1989), a story about the life of the enormously successful jazz dancer, Josephine Baker. In the following excerpt from her response journal, Tanya focused on Josephine Baker's resolve to become a professional dancer in spite of challenges from others who believed she was not capable of accomplishing such a goal:

> This book is about a girl who wanted to be a female dancer but a man said she couldn't because she was to little. But she kept saying she wasn't to little to dance until he let her dance on stage. . . I think Josephine Baker was a great dancer in her days. This book gets you to dance because of famous legends. Two thumbs up for Josephine.

Through her reading and writing about the lives of notable African Americans—especially African American women—Tanya was able to rearticulate some of her own life experiences and social codes. In this process, she seemed to deepen her understanding of certain life situations (e.g., poverty and ridicule) and certain human comportments (e.g., self-respect and resoluteness). Reciprocally, Tanya's richer and more complex understanding of certain dimensions of her own life allowed her to understand and interpret the life stories of Diana Ross and Josephine Baker more fully. Bruner (1986) has referred to this reciprocal process of envisionment as the subjunctivization of experience. He has argued that reading one's self through the stories of others and others through the stories of one's self constitutes the remarkable power of narrative ways of knowing. Similarly, MacIntyre (1981) has called attention to the importance of using stories of the

lives of others as "dramatic resources" for constructing one's own code of ethics and evaluating the ethical comportments of others.

Tanya also explored possible selves, celebrated particular role models, and constructed her own literate values, moral codes, and everyday practices through the stories, essays, and poems that she wrote. As she did through acts of reading, Tanya used writing to reciprocally articulate certain dimensions of her own life with her understanding of the lives and issues of people about which she wrote. This process was made transparent to us when Tanya discussed her poem, Harriet Tubman, which apears in Appendix I. First, she described the context in which she decided to write the poem and her reasons for choosing to focus on Harriet Tubman:

> Um, it was, since it was Black History Month, I thought I would write something about Black History Month, and then my teacher said, "you could write a story or a poem" So I thought about writing a Black history story.
>
> I wrote about other, um, Black history people like let's say Dr. Martin Luther King, and I wrote about Leontyne Price and different people like that, and then Harriet Tubman just popped into my mind 'cause she was the first lady I wanted to write about 'cause I didn't want to write about no Black history man. My first one was a man, that was Dr. Martin Luther King. . . . Then I wanted to write about Harriet Tubman 'cause she's a women, or a lady, and I think it's good.

In subsequent comments, Tanya revealed how writing the poem about Harriet Tubman had provided her with a way to affirm her own developing identity as a writer, as well as a way to celebrate the life of an African American women whose courage and kindness she greatly admired and sought to emulate:

> When I grow up, I tell my teacher and my mother and my father that when I grow up I want to be a Black poetess or a story writer or a writer to write about Black history people from the past. . . . Harriet Tubman was one of the people who lived long ago, not long ago, but kind of long, far ago.

Um, I think she was a nice person 'cause she helped a lot of people, and she just didn't go on and find the way to be free by herself and stay in Canada just to free herself. She freed a lot of people. I think she was a nice person.

When I wrote it I felt like I was right there, when she was freeing her people, and I was one of the people that she freed, and I was thanking her so much.

Imagining herself as a celebrated writer was also a common theme within many of Tanya's entries in her reading-response journal. In particular, Tanya continually reiterated her desire to one day write a book of poetry. For example, in response to a book of poems by African American authors entitled Honey, I Love and Other Tales (Greenfield, 1978), Tanya wrote, "I think this is a good book because their telling me about black poetry that I never heard before. I think one day I'll write a book like this one or something like it."

Although Tanya adopted ethical and political postures in and through her reading and writing less frequently than personal and social ones, these postures were implicit in her desire to become a "preacher" or a "Black poetess," thus indexing her emerging ethical and political conscience. Especially interesting in this regard was Tanya's sense of the power of both speech and writing to "Forge a Moral Code for Oneself," and to "Transform People's Values or Beliefs about Social Problems," perhaps mobilizing them to change their lives. This sense was evident both in an essay that she wrote entitled, Non-Violence (see Appendix G) and in her discussion of this essay, as well as how came to write it:

> I was watching a T.V. show, no it was a movie and this lady, she writes a lot of books and she try to stop crime in her book sometimes, and I just got the idea out of it, and I thought I'll just write a story [to stop crime], and I'll probably be old enough to write a book by myself, but I thought I'd just write a story. . . .
>
> My story's about different things that should happen, that has happened in the world. . . . I like people to think, I like people to think, I like people to stop doing crimes. That's the whole reason I wrote this story, 'cause I want people to stop doing crimes. And

stop killing people. . . . I wrote it for other people, so if they read it they might get something, get something out, like to stop doing violence.

In sum, Tanya enacted several interrelated personal, social, and political functions in ways that were partially unique. For her, reading often served as a vehicle for remembering and savoring past experiences, as well as a way to reflect upon and negotiate important social relationships such as peer friendships. Tanya also explored and celebrated possible selves through reading and writing about the lives and impact of particular African-American leaders and role models, especially famous African American women. In the context of re-inscribing the lives and messages of these people, Tanya continually affirmed the values and practices of her own developing identity as a writer and literate person. Finally, Tanya's comportment toward certain possible selves and her motivation for becoming a writer were closely related to her developing ethical and political sensibilities.

Final Comments

In the context of a single school classroom, we examined several issues not yet fully addressed in the research on children's writing and response to literature. First, we documented the extent to which children used reading and writing as a means of personal, social, and political understanding by examining the functions that five children assigned to the self-selected reading and writing that they did about themselves, their families and communities, and their culture. Second, we examined the ways in which specific types of personal, social, and political functions were distributed differently across reading and writing modes. Third, we explored similarities and differences in the ways that reading and writing functioned in the lives of the five case-study children. Finally, we demonstrated how two of the case-study children constructed unique reading and writing repertoires through their idiomatic appropriation and orchestration of specific personal, social, and political functions. We also showed how these repertoires were related to the children's particular frameworks of experience.

Our examination of the functions found to underlie and motivate children's literate activities indicated that they used reading and writing to accomplish a wide range of personal, social, and

political goals. The overwhelming proportion of children's reading and writing functioned in personal ways. More specifically, children's reading and writing served as occasions for personal enjoyment and entertainment and as vehicles for savoring past experiences, objectifying and reconciling problematic emotions, exploring possible selves and identifying with role models, and celebrating literate values and practices. Children's reading and writing also functioned in more social and political ways, helping them to affirm or transform social relationships in their immediate worlds, to understand and consider possibilities for transforming social problems and injustices, and to fashion social and moral codes.

Although some of these personal, social, and political functions have been implicit in previous studies of children's reading and writing (e.g., Garrison & Hynds, 1991; Fiering, 1981; Many, 1991; Rogers, 1991; Shuman, 1986; Wolf & Heath, 1993), few have been made explicit and many have remained largely unnoticed. For example, although these researchers have pointed out that children sometimes relate reading, writing, and personal experience, the nature and functions of such relations have remained relatively unspecified. In comparison with previous research, we documented with much greater specificity some of the life-informing and life-transforming functions enacted by children through acts of reading and writing, as well as the text-informing and text-transforming power of children's experiences and life histories. Additionally, we reported some functions of reading and writing that, to the best of our knowledge have not been reported heretofore. Finally, through our situated case-study accounts of Jamar and Tanya, we articulated more clearly how children's literate activities and their practices of everyday life may interanimate one another. These case study accounts also allowed us to illustrate how particular children construct their own functional repertoires through their idiomatic appropriation and orchestration of specific personal, social, and political functions.

The findings from this study have a number of implications for understanding children's literacy development, as well as for literacy pedagogy. In particular, these findings suggest the need to reconsider our notions of the core functions of reading and writing. This reconsideration would involve shifting attention from comprehending or communicating the conceptual content of

written messages to reading and writing life through texts and texts through life. Indeed, the children in this study prefigured this shift in the ways that they took up the invitation to read and write about themselves, their friends, their families, their community, and their culture. In this regard, these children enacted what many narrative theorists, reader-response theorists, and theorists of critical literacy have claimed to be one of the most fundamental dimensions of being literate, namely using reading and writing as vehicles for personal, social, and political understanding, negotiation, and transformation.

In addition to encouraging us to rethink our current conceptions of what it means to read and write, the results from the present study suggest that we reconsider the purposes or reasons for which we engage children in reading and writing in school. In relation to this point, it may be that language arts instruction that focuses primarily on the acquisition and production of textual meaning denies children access to significant personal, social, and political possibilities and consequences that might be afforded by adopting different and perhaps more critical perspectives concerning the functions of reading and writing. Again, the children in this study foreshadowed such a shift in perspective through their own reading and writing practices.

In light of these possibilities and consequences, we are led to underscore the importance of developing literacy programs that foreground the life-informing dimensions of literacy and actively engage children in exploring some of the humanizing and transformative functions of reading and writing not fully embodied in programs spawned by whole language and process-writing approaches to literacy instruction. Developing such programs would involve more than simply replacing basal readers with authentic children's literature, more than substituting teacher-led discussions with peer-led (but teacher-influenced) discussions, and more than supplanting product-oriented approaches to writing with process-oriented ones. Such programs would be built upon an integration of the ideas and constructs embodied in the work of narrative theorists, reader-response theorists, and theorists of critical literacy that we outlined in the beginning of this article. We tend to think of such programs as moderate or modified versions of "critical literacy," and we have developed a set of minimum requirements for such programs. First, they would emphasize

cultivating the development of classroom communities within which reading and writing are central everyday practices used for communicating, socializing, and humanizing purposes. Such communities would be dynamic spaces where meanings, practices, roles, and responsibilities are constantly being constructed and reconstructed in and through social interactions, discourse, and material practice. Indeed, such a community developed in the classroom where the present study was conducted. Noting just a few anecdotes from our experience in this classroom will help to illustrate this point. In an act that we thought was progressive but that turned out to be co-optive, we (the researchers) and the teacher set up a writing center in the classroom and attempted to name it the "Writers' Workshop." In a collective counter-hegemonic act, the children rejected the idea that writing activities should be separated from other kinds of classroom work; they argued for a more organic or holistic "form of life" within the classroom; and they lobbied to name this "form of life" the "Writers' Community." Within this community, the children, along with their teacher and the researchers, reorganized the use of classroom space, restructured social participation structures, and enacted a variety of personal, social, and political functions through acts of reading and writing that were at least partially novel or "fresh," as the children would say.

Second, such programs would be designed to encourage children to explore the social, cultural, and ideological foundations of literacy by "foreground[ing] the extent to which [their] own writing and reading are themselves verbally coded discursive activities that inform the production and interpretation of social and political meanings, rendering some ways with words and ways of being-in-the-world as more probable, more natural, or more desirable than others" (Kamberelis & Scott, 1992, p.400). The children in this study were exemplary in this regard. Through the personal, social, and political functions that they enacted, these children evidenced many ways in which they were discovering, challenging, and attempting to change various individual, collective, and ideological dimensions of their own discourses and lives.

Third, moderate critical literacy programs would make visible the transformative possibilities of literacy by encouraging children to engage in individual acts of reading and writing aimed at consciousness raising and social and political change. Indeed, such transformative

possibilities were embodied in many of the literate acts of the children in the present study. Jamar, for example, worked to deepen his understanding of social injustice, inter-group conflict, and homelessness, as well as to inform and transform other people's understandings about these issues. And Tanya explored her own understandings of friendship, social surveillance, humanizing resoluteness, and morality through acts of reading and writing. Moreover, she entertained the possibility of becoming a Black writer and poetess so that she could make public her new understandings and perhaps transform the attitudes and values of others.

Several specific dimensions of classroom organization, culture, and practice come to mind as important—even essential—for the success of such programs. First, teachers in such programs would be invested not only in the literacy learning of their students but also in their lives, their families, and their communities. This idea is not new. It was the hallmark of Dewey's experienced-based educational philosophy (Dworkin, 1959); it was latent in many of the curriculum reform movements in the United Kingdom and the United States during the 1960s and 1970s; and it is central to much contemporary educational rhetoric and practice (e.g., Heath & McLaughlin, 1993; Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988).

Second, invitations would be extended to children that encourage them to explore personal, social, and political topics related to their own lives—topics that are often glossed or even taboo in many elementary school classrooms. This would include making available books and other materials that are personally meaningful, culturally relevant, and politically enlightening. We are reminded here of the ways in which Robin Williams (a.k.a. Mrs. Doubtfire) in the current film by the same name (Garces-Williams, Williams, & Radcliffe, 1993) transformed an archaic and uninteresting educational television program for children into a vital and very popular one. He/she did this by focusing on issues and concerns that really mattered to his/her child audience and by replacing the educational-television-speak of the original program with registers and genres that made these issues and concerns maximally accessible to the children. Expanding the themes and topics that children are encouraged to explore would also include providing concrete opportunities that might catalyze their desires to explore personal, social, and political issues in their own lives.

In our study, this function was accomplished in a modest way by conducting "the neighborhood tour," by inviting community leaders and writers to speak with the children, and by encouraging the children's parents to explore the functions of literacy in their own lives.

Third, reading and writing activities would be informed by and evolve from children's own speech genres (Daiute, 1993) rather than slightly modified school-based speech genres. In this regard, the focus of talk about reading and writing would not always be redirected toward the structure and meaning of texts. Children's lived experiences, issues, and practices would be considered equally valid and valuable topics of literature-based conversations. Teachers and researchers would continually seek ways to interrupt the historically informed socialization practices of classroom talk and text production that we have inherited from a tradition of schooling as social reproduction in this country. For this to happen researchers and teachers would need to become "transformative intellectuals," interrogating the subtle and probably unexamined ways in which we continue to constrain the nature and flow of topics and the patterns of social interaction within classroom activities (Giroux, 1988). In connection with this point, it has been well-documented that the reading and writing groups of both children and adults outside of school are much more self-organizing, dynamic, disruptive, and productive than those that typically occur in school contexts (Heath & McLaughlin, 1993; Gere, 1987; Long, 1986; Radway, 1984). By allowing the children in our study to share in decisions about the spatial organization of the classroom, the content of the curriculum, what roles and responsibilities they could assume, what social participation structures were permissible, and what counted as reading and writing and for what reasons, we began to disrupt our "old ways" of thinking about literacy instruction, thus allowing more dynamic, democratic, and socially productive ways to emerge.

Our ideas about the ideologies and practices of moderate critical literacy programs grew out of our observations of the literate community that developed in the context of the present study. Some of these ideas were embodied quite fully and explicitly within this community. Others remained emergent and partial. Yet by providing the children in this study with personally and culturally relevant materials, occasions to read and write about issues close to their own hearts and

lives, and legitimate roles in the construction of the culture, social organization, power relations, and materiality of the classroom, we think that we catalyzed to some extent their efforts to explore a wider range of personal, social, and political functions in their reading and writing than is typical in many basal-based or whole language-oriented elementary school classrooms. As they engaged in these functions, the children seemed to appreciate more fully the humanizing and transformative possibilities and consequences of being readers and writers. The children's appreciation of these possibilities and consequences suggests the value of articulating, implementing, and studying more fully moderate versions of critical literacy within elementary school classrooms—versions that grow out of and are responsive to children's developmental sensibilities, personal life histories, cultural heritages, and community situations.

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Table 1

Percentages and (Raw Scores) of Interview Comments Associated with Personal, Social, and Political Functions Combined Across Children

Function	Reading (n)	Writing (n)	TOTAL (N)
Personal Functions			
Related to Present Recreational Interests, Present Problems, or Possible Selves	83.2% (149)	62.9% (102)	73.6% (251)
Social Functions			
Related to Understanding or Negotiating Social Relationships	8.4% (15)	24.7% (40)	16.1% (55)
Political Functions			
Related to Social Problems and Social Action	8.4% (15)	12.3% (20)	10.3% (35)
TOTAL	100% (179)	100% (162)	100% (341)

Table 2

Percentages and (Raw Scores) of Interview Comments Associated with Global Personal, Social, and Political Functions for Individual Children

Global Functions	Jamar			Billy			Edward			Ricardo			Tanya		
	Reading	Writing	Total	Reading	Writing	Total	Reading	Writing	Total	Reading	Writing	Total	Reading	Writing	Total
Personal Functions															
Related to Present Recreational Interests, Present Problems, or Possible Selves	74.1% (40)	58.3% (21)	67.8% (61)	72.2% (13)	44.4% (8)	58.3% (421	98.0% (48)	66.7% (28)	83.5% (76)	61.0% (14)	69.9% (23)	66.1% (37)	97.0% (32)	68.6% (24)	82.4% (56)
Social Functions															
Related to Understanding or Negotiating Social Relationships	9.3% (5)	13.9% (5)	11.1% (10)	22.2% (4)	33.3% (6)	27.8% (10)	0.0% (0)	33.3% (14)	15.4% (14)	21.7% (5)	18.2% (6)	21.4% (12)	3.0% (1)	22.8% (8)	13.2% (9)
Political Functions															
Related to Social Problems and Social Action	16.6% (9)	27.8% (10)	21.1% (19)	5.6% (1)	22.2% (4)	13.9% (5)	2.0% (1)	0.0% (0)	1.1% (1)	17.4% (4)	9.1% (3)	12.5% (7)	0.0% (0)	8.6% (3)	4.4% (3)
TOTAL	100% (54)	100% (36)	100% (90)	100% (18)	100% (18)	100% (36)	100% (49)	100% (42)	100% (91)	100% (23)	100% (33)	100% (56)	100% (33)	100% (35)	100% (68)

Table 3

Percentages and (Raw Scores) of Interview Comments Associated with Specific Reading and Writing Functions Combined Across Children

Function	Reading (n)	Writing (n)	TOTAL (N)
Personal Functions			
Related to Present Recreational Interests			
Provide personal enjoyment or entertainment	23.4% (42)	6.2% (10)	15.2% (52)
Remember or savor personal experiences	8.4% (15)	13.0% (21)	10.6% (36)
Experience, participate in imaginary worlds or lives	8.9% (16)	0.0% (0)	4.7% (16)
Learn more about personal interests	5.0% (9)	0.6% (1)	2.9% (10)
Related to Present Problems			
Express or objectify personal needs or desires	0.0% (0)	2.5% (4)	1.2% (4)
Objectify or reconcile problematic emotions	7.9% (14)	9.3% (15)	8.5% (29)
Express ideas difficult to express in speech	0.0% (0)	2.5% (4)	1.2% (4)
Envision possible events to mitigate present problems	2.2% (4)	3.7% (6)	2.9% (10)
Enlist other's help in understanding problems or emotions	0.5% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.3% (1)
Related to Possible Selves			
Explore or celebrate possible selves or role models	18.4% (33)	12.9% (21)	15.8% (54)
Self-consciously celebrate literate values or practices	5.0% (9)	8.6% (14)	6.7% (23)
Forge or envision a moral code for one's self	3.4% (6)	3.7% (6)	3.5% (12)
Social Functions			
Related to Understanding or Negotiating Social Relationships			
Provide enjoyment or entertainment to others	0.5% (1)	2.5% (4)	1.5% (5)
Assist others in remembering personal experiences	0.0% (0)	3.1% (5)	1.5% (5)
Understand or negotiate social relationships in one's world	3.9% (7)	11.7% (19)	7.6% (26)
Affirm reciprocation within personal relationships	1.7% (3)	2.5% (4)	2.1% (7)
Provide others with knowledge or new ways of seeing the world	2.2% (4)	2.5% (4)	2.3% (8)
Share common experiences that strengthen or mobilize others	0.0% (0)	2.5% (4)	1.2% (4)
Political Functions			
Functions Related to Social Problems and Social Action			
Understand or raise awareness of social problems and injustice	6.7% (12)	6.2% (10)	6.5% (22)
Transform people's values or beliefs about social problems	1.7% (3)	6.2% (10)	3.8% (13)
TOTAL	100% (179)	100% (162)	100% (341)

Table 4

Personal, Social, and Political Functions Associated with Jamar's Reading and Writing

Percentages and (Raw Scores) of Interview Comments, and Response-Journal Excerpts Associated with Functions

Function	Interview Comments Reading	Writing	Total	Response Journal Excerpts Reading
Personal Functions				
Related to Present Recreational Interests				
Provide personal enjoyment or entertainment	18.5% (10)	5.6% (2)	13.3% (12)	32.1% (9)
Remember or savor personal experiences	9.3% (5)	0.0% (0)	5.6% (5)	0.0% (0)
Experience or participate in imaginary worlds or lives	14.8% (8)	0.0% (0)	8.9% (8)	14.2% (4)
Learn more about personal interests	1.9% (1)	0.0% (0)	1.1% (1)	14.2% (4)
Related to Present Problems				
Express or objectify personal needs or desires	0.0% (0)	2.8% (1)	1.1% (1)	0.0% (0)
Objectify or reconcile problematic emotions	13.0% (7)	19.4% (7)	15.6% (14)	0.0% (0)
Express ideas difficult to express in speech	0.0% (0)	5.6% (2)	2.2% (2)	0.0% (0)
Envision possible events to mitigate present problems	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
Enlist other's help in understanding problems or emotions	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
Related to Possible Selves				
Explore or celebrate possible selves or role models	9.3% (5)	11.1% (4)	10.0% (9)	17.9% (5)
Self-consciously celebrate literate values or practices	3.7% (2)	9.5% (4)	6.6% (6)	0.0% (0)
Forge or envision a moral code for one's self	3.7% (2)	2.8% (1)	3.3% (3)	0.0% (0)
Social Functions				
Related to Understanding or Negotiating Social Relationships				
Provide enjoyment or entertainment to others	0.0% (0)	2.8% (1)	1.1% (1)	0.0% (0)
Assist others in remembering personal experiences	0.0% (0)	2.8% (1)	1.1% (1)	0.0% (0)
Understand or negotiate relationships in one's social world	6.0% (3)	2.8% (1)	4.4% (4)	3.6% (1)
Affirm reciprocation within personal relationships	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
Provides others with knowledge or new ways of seeing the world	3.7% (2)	0.0% (0)	2.2% (2)	0.0% (0)
Shares common experiences that strengthen or mobilize others	0.0% (0)	5.6% (2)	2.2% (2)	0.0% (0)
Political Functions				
Related to Social Problems and Social Action				
Understand or raise awareness of social problems and injustice	14.8% (8)	8.3% (3)	12.2% (11)	17.9% (5)
Transform people's values or beliefs about social problems	1.9% (1)	19.4% (7)	8.9% (8)	0.0% (0)
TOTAL	100% (54)	100% (36)	100% (90)	100% (28)

Table 5

Personal, Social, and Political Functions Associated with Tanya's Reading and Writing

Percentages and (Raw Scores) of Interview Comments, and Response-Journal Excerpts Associated with Functions

Function	Interview Comments Reading	Writing	Total	Response Journal Excerpts Reading
Personal Functions				
Related to Present Recreational Interests				
Provide personal enjoyment or entertainment	21.2% (7)	8.6% (3)	14.7% (10)	30.0% (18)
Remember or savor personal experiences	12.1% (4)	25.7% (9)	19.1% (13)	3.3% (2)
Experience, participate in imaginary worlds or lives	15.1% (5)	0.0% (0)	7.4% (5)	11.7% (7)
Learn more about personal interests	3.0% (1)	2.9% (1)	2.9% (2)	13.3% (8)
Related to Present Problems				
Express or objectify personal needs or desires	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
Objectify or reconcile problematic emotions	3.0% (1)	0.0% (0)	1.5% (1)	0.0% (0)
Express ideas difficult to express in speech	0.0% (0)	5.7% (2)	2.9% (2)	0.0% (0)
Envision possible events to mitigate present problems	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
Enlist other's help in understanding problems or emotions	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
Related to Possible Selves				
Explore or celebrate possible selves or role models	30.3% (10)	17.1% (6)	23.5% (16)	15.0% (9)
Self-consciously celebrate literate values or practices	9.1% (3)	5.7% (2)	7.4% (65	8.3% (5)
Forge or envision a moral code for one's self	3.0% (1)	2.9% (1)	2.9% (2)	1.7% (1)
Social Functions				
Related to Understanding or Negotiating Social Relationships				
Provide enjoyment or entertainment to others	0.0 (0)	5.7% (2)	2.9% (2))	0.0% (0)
Assist others in remembering personal experiences	0.0 (0)	5.7% (2)	2.9% (2)	0.0% (0)
Understand or negotiate relationships in one's social world	3.3% (1)	11.4% (4)	7.4% (5)	15.0% (9)
Affirm reciprocation within personal relationships	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
Provides others with knowledge or new ways of seeing the world	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
Shares common experiences that strengthen or mobilize others	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.0% (0)
Political Functions				
Related to Social Problems and Social Action				
Understand or raise awareness of social problems and injustice	0.0% (0)	5.7% (2)	2.9% (2)	1.7% (1)
Transform people's values or beliefs about social problems	0.0% (0)	2.9% (1)	1.5% (1))	0.0% (0)
TOTAL	100% (33)	100% (35)	100% (68)	100% (60)

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Dwain

Figure 2. I Want to Visit Space

Dwain and I are good friends. We both like to write. Maybe one day we will both be writers and write books about drugs that they are bad. That they do kill. That they are not your friend but they enemy. And we will save lives and the world because we care.

I want to visit space when I grow up. I've always wanted to see space but I get scrd (scared) sometimes becausase my brain starts to go crazy. So I don't think about that any more. my mother is cooking dinner. After i eat i think about space more. And I think about myself as a important person. Like Niel Armstrong. I would descover something That was so small but so powerful by itself could power a plane. Or even a jet. but maybe I won't be a space exploerer. Maybe I will be a actor. I want to do a lot of things. Iwatch a lot of space programs sometimes I wounder what would happen if an animal was sent to space. Space has always ben mesery [mystery] to me what would happen to us without space sometimes. Sometimes I go to sleep thinking of space. I fall into a deep sleep. I dream that I am a important person. That I discovered something that could stop polshin [pollution]. Polshin is a very big problem. In the future I hope that this problem will be solved. I hope the future is as clean as [I] think it will be. If siniect [scientists] decide to send garbage into space maybe space would do something to the garbage. And recycle it that would solve our garbage problem. Or send a rocket to the sun. Sinicest already thought about it but they did not do it they thought it might do something to the sun. And cause problems for the city.

If they took a chance who knows what could of happened. Sometimes of you take a chance with Mother nature you end up wrong. most people do that but [that] makes another problem.

Appendix A

Taxonomy of Personal, Social, and Political Functions of Reading and Writing

I. Personal Functions

Functions Related to Present Recreational Interests

* To provide personal enjoyment, entertainment, and new ways of seeing the world for one's self
* To describe, remember, and/or savor personal experiences and/or interests (also to anticipate future experiences and events)
* To experience, participate in imagined/imaginary worlds or imagined/imaginary lives of fictional characters (subsumes personal enjoyment and entertainment)
* To learn more about and develop personal interests or hobbies

Functions Related to Present Problems

* To express or objectify personal needs or desires
* To objectify, understand, reconcile, or perhaps purge problematic emotions regarding self and/or personal relationships in and out of school (usually difficult to accomplish through speech)
* To express ideas that are difficult to express in speech
* To envision future events and possible lives in order to mitigate present problems or circumstances for oneself
* To enlist the help of others in understanding and dealing with personal experiences and problematic emotional states

Functions Related to Possible Selves

* To envision, explore, celebrate possible selves or role models from real life or literature (e.g., future roles, responsibilities, aspirations for one's self, sometimes in relation to role models)
* To self-consciously enact and celebrate literate attitudes, values, and practices (e.g., to celebrate one's role/identity as an author or literate person; to acknowledge the role of reading as a source of information for future writing)
* To begin to forge a moral code for one's self. May involve envisioning possibilities for social action and citizenship.

II. Social Functions

Functions Related to Understanding or Negotiating Social Relationships

* To provide enjoyment and entertainment for others
* To invite or encourage others to describe, remember, and/or savor personal experiences and/or interests (also to anticipate future experiences and events)
* To establish, celebrate, transform relationships/roles with people in one's immediate social world or to celebrate membership and affiliation with particular social/cultural groups (e.g., family, peers)
* To inform others about the importance of developing and reciprocating within personal relationships in one's life.
* To provide others with knowledge and new ways of seeing the world
* To share information and experience designed to help other people deal with problematic emotions and events involving social relationships in their life

III. Political Functions

Functions Related to Social Problems and Social Action

* To become aware of, understand, or make others aware of social problems and social injustices (e.g., racism, poverty, homelessness, violence, environment, drug abuse)
* To transform other people's values, attitudes, beliefs, with respect to social problems (e.g., racism, poverty, homelessness, violence, environment, drug abuse, or ways of perceiving the world)

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Appendix B

Basketball by Edward

I like playing basketball. Sometimes I get confused because one day Michael D. had to pick some kids to go in the gym to play basketball. Michael picked me. I was happy. It was fun all the boys did not want to go to science but our gym teacher told us it was time to go. I stold the ball from Dwain. I almost had the ball but Lionel stold the ball from me. My team lost by one point.

I came home skiping around. My mom said what's the matter with you. I said I am just happy. My mom said for what. I played basketball. My mom said so what. I said you don't understand because it was fun.

Appendix C

My Life by Ricardo

Part 1.

I would like to tell about my self. I am doing pretty good in school I hope that I git a good report card. And I like school very much and I like to read and I like to draw to. And I really like to tell my class is to stay in school.

Part 2.

I wish I was not the onle child because I don't have no one to play with. I don't have no one to spend Chrismas with. But I have a sister it feels like I am the onle child around but my mother say that she seen her mother at a party. My mother say her name is J.J.

Part 3.

My grandfather die on November 17, 1990. I went to a furlehome [funeral] to see my grandfather. I love him very much hie was a good man. hie [he] has five kids. there names are Kim, Gaynell, Garry, Claira, Rauna.

Appendix D

Emergency by Jamar

One day I stayed home from school because I was sick. My father was taking care of me. When my twin brother Jason came home from school my older brother's friend, Roderick, wanted to see my older brother, John. My father wouldn't let Roderick come in because he knew he dealed crack and my brother, John, had gotten in trouble with him the day before.

On the day I was sick, Roderick came down to my house with his friend. This is how it happened they were pulled over by the police my big brother John was with them. The police found crack in the car so the car was confiscated so Roderick came down to my house to talk to my brother John but my father wouldn't let him he asked my father, "What's your problem?" "I don't have a problem," said my father. Roderick and his friend backed away from the house. Roderick started to shoot and hit the window and hit the stereo. He shot the kitchen and hit the cupboard. Jason and I got down on the floor.

My mother came home from work, she is a teacher. My father told her what happened and they called the police they came right over. The second time they shot they hit the door my mother called the police at 9:30 p.m. but they didn't get there until 10:00 p.m. We stayed with my grandfather until Friday. When I came home I was sick my father got protection nothing has happened so far. I think of this scary memory all the time it is really scary to me.

Appendix E

Me and a New Friend by Billy

When I play on the playground I met a friend his name is Nicholas. Nicholas and I had played basketball. I won but Nicholas needed one more point. Nicholas is a good friend. He is like a brother to me. And the next game he won. We played tag I was it but Nicholas is to fast for me. Nicholas and I played in school when I first met Nicholas I wanted to be friends. I knew we would be friends today and tomorrow.

Appendix F

Jamar by Edward

Jamar is my best friend. Jamar is smart. He helps me if someone tries to beat me up. Jamar tells me a lot of stories that happened in his life. Everyone should have a best friend.

Appendix G

Non-Violence by Tanya

I think there shouldn't be violence over dumb things because people are dying for nothing. I don't think violence is good because sometimes when kids walk up and down the street and see people killing each other and they learn how to kill. I don't think people or kids should be scared to walk down the street.

The reason I wrote this story is because I wanted people to know my feelings about violence and that feeling is I don't think there should be violence because sometimes when someone dies the President doesn't do anything about it and I don't think it is fair. I think the Mayor is the only one person in charge doing something to help stop crime and help people when they are in trouble. So please help stop crime because I know I am.

Appendix H

Poor People by Jamar

I'm going to help people when I grow up and even when I'm a child I'm going to help poor people. I'm going to run a homeless center for all I would give them clothes. I would feel very good and I know some people would help to. Thats what I'm going to do. I would like to give them a house to. I will help in many different ways. All I want to do is help people who don't have the money. It will be the best. Let's help it's the right thing to do. Sometimes I walk or ride past a poor person one time I was at the market with my mother and brother Jason and I saw a poor person. I ask my mother to give them a dollar but when my mother came out of the car he was gone. I was sad. I had wished that I could have the money when I see another poor person I am going to help him and I will do it.

Appendix I

Harriet Tubman by Tanya

Brave was her name.
A slave and also a slave hero.
She took her people to
Canada to let them be free
and have freedom. Girl didn't
come in this world to be
no slave. She freed more
then a hundred people.
Grandma moses they called
her, but she still did not
come in this world to be
no slave.